

Amendments to the Specification

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 1, line 7, through line, 28, with the following rewritten paragraph:

To implement the safety and flexibility management of secret information and the protection risk management of intellectual properties, secret information distributing (i.e., sharing) techniques for distributing digital information into several pieces of the information to share and manage them were researched (refer to documents: Adi Shamir, "How to share a secret," Communications of the ACM, Vol.22, No.11, pp.612-613, 1979, Markus Stadler, "Publicly Verifiable Secret Sharing," EUROCRYPT'96, Lecture Notes in Computer Science 1070, pp.190-199, 1996, and Wakaha Ogata, "On the Practical Secret Sharing Scheme," IEICE Trans. Fundamentals, Vol.E84-A, No.1, pp.256-261, 1999 2001). Recently, visual secret information sharing/distributing techniques (i.e., methods for sharing/distributing visual data) have been researched (refer to documents: Moni Naor, Adi Shamir, "Visual Cryptography," EUROCRYPT'94, Lecture Notes in Computer Science 950, pp.1-12, 1994, and Hiroki Koga "A General Formula of the (t,n) Threshold Visual Secret Sharing Scheme," ASIACRYPT2002, Lecture Notes in Computer Science 2510, pp.328-345, 2002). In this context, apparatus using visual properties for distributing/sharing visual secret and for decoding the distributed pieces of visual secret into the original visual secret without need of a special device has been developed. This approach is a technique sharing secret such that, for example, by superimposing two images, each of which is not recognized that what (i.e., the secret) is presented therein, into one meaningful image, which is recognized that what (i.e., the secret) is presented therein.